



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

OUR INDIAN PROBLEM.

BY THE REV. LYMAN ABBOTT, D. D.

HELEN JACKSON has written the history of a hundred years of our nation's dealing with the Indians, under the title of "A Century of Dishonor." Her specifications seem to make the indictment of her title good. Yet I am persuaded that the dishonor which justly attaches to the history of our dealings with the North American Indians is due rather to a lack of prophetic vision, quite pardonable, in the nation's leaders, and an ignorance and indifference, not pardonable, in the nation at large, rather than to any deliberate policy of injustice adopted by the nation. Bad as has been our treatment of the Indians, it is luminous by the side of Russia's treatment of the Jews, Turkey's treatment of the Armenians, Spain's treatment of the Moors, and, if we include the war of Cromwell against the Irish, the English legislation against Irish industry, Irish education, and the Church of Ireland's choice, it compares favorably with England's treatment of Ireland.

When thirteen States—a fringe of civilization on the eastern edge of an unknown wilderness—constituted the American Republic, there was no prophet to foresee the time when the Republic would stretch from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Lakes to the Gulf of Mexico, and would include seventy million people. If there were any such prophet he was as a voice crying in the wilderness; no one heard or heeded. The politician is almost invariably an opportunist, perhaps necessarily so, since no great prevision is granted to the children of men. The infant republic did not know and took little pains to ascertain either the extent of the domain which stretched to the west, or the number or character of the people who roamed over it. Each decade was satisfied to provide for its own necessities and leave the next decade to take care of itself. As the boundary line was pushed

steadily westward new treaties were made, by which all territory west of a given boundary was reserved for the Indians forever. I think it was in 1800 that such a treaty was made, securing to them for all future time the land west of the Mississippi River. All future time is a long while, and each new treaty was made only to be broken, as increase of population and incoming immigration made new demands on the continent for support. Thus gradually grew up without design the so-called reservation system. Less and less land was reserved to the Indians; more and more was taken up by the whites; until at last certain relatively small sections were deeded to separate Indian tribes. In these, according to the treaties made, the several tribes were at liberty to remain forever hunters and trappers, freed from the obligations and without the advantages and perils of civilization.

These reservations have been practically prison yards, within which the tribes have been confined. If any member passed beyond the boundaries of the reservation without leave he was liable to arrest. If he raised crops or manufactured goods he could not carry them for sale to the open market; if he wished to buy he could not go to the open market to purchase. The land was owned by the tribe in common, and the idle and industrious shared alike its advantages and disadvantages. Industry received no reward; idleness involved no penalty. Money due the tribe under the treaty was paid with more or less regularity, generally in rations, sometimes in guns and ammunition to fight the white man with, or scalping knives to take from his head a trophy of the battle. The forms of industry to which the men were accustomed—hunting and trapping—gradually disappeared; little or nothing was done to teach new forms of industry or to inspire the men to undertake them. From the reservation all the currents of civilization were excluded by Federal law. The railroad, the telegraph, the newspaper, the open market, free competition—all halted at its walls. By favor of the government, generally freely granted, the missionary was allowed to establish a church, or Christian philanthropy to plant a school. But as an educated Indian was rather impeded than aided in the tribal community by education, neither the church nor the school could do more than save individuals from a population shut up by law to the general conditions of barbarism. No courts sat in these reservations; no law was admin-

istered by those judicial methods familiar to the Anglo-Saxon ; no warrants from local courts outside could be executed ; no Indian, if wronged, could appeal to any court for redress. Such law as existed was administered by an Indian agent, a person of ill-defined, and to the Indian mind, of illimitable power. He was as nearly an absolute despot as can be conceived existing on American soil. He was sometimes an intelligent and beneficent despot, sometimes an ignorant and incompetent one ; but in either case a despot.

Thus there has grown up in America, by no deliberate design, but by a natural though mischievous opportunism which has rarely looked more than ten years ahead, a system as inconsistent with American principles and the American spirit as could easily be devised by the ingenuity or conceived by the imagination of man. It has denied to the Indian, often under the generous desire to do more for him than mere justice, those rights and prerogatives which the Declaration of Independence truly declares to belong inalienably to all men. It has made a prisoner of him that it might civilize him, under the illusion that it is possible to civilize a race without subjecting them to the perils of civilization. It has endeavored to conduct him from the relative innocence of barbarism to the larger and more perilous life of a free and civilized community, and to guard him from the dangers of temptation and the consequences of his own ignorance *en route*. The reservation system is absolutely, hopelessly, incurably bad, "evil and wholly evil and that continually." It was never framed by anyone. It has grown up under the commingled influence of careless indifference, popular ignorance, local prejudice and unthinking sentimentalism. The Indian problem is, in a sentence, how to get rid of it in the easiest and quickest way possible, and bring the Indian and every Indian into the same individual relation to the State and Federal governments that other men in this country are, with the least possible violence of rupture with the past and the greatest possible regard for the rights and the welfare of those who are the least responsible for the present conditions—the Indians themselves.

The reservation system, I say, is wholly bad. The indictment against it is fourfold.

In the first place, the Indian Bureau is, and always has been, a political machine, whose offices are among the spoils which be-

long to the victors. In the twenty years during which I have had some familiarity with Indian affairs, not a single Commissioner of Indian Affairs has been appointed because he was familiar with the Indians or an expert in the Indian problem, and only one who was an expert in that work of education which is, of course, one of the chiefest elements in the Indian problem. They have been, I think, all of them, men of excellent character—honest, able, ambitious to do the best that could be done for the Indian. Some of them have made notable contributions toward the solution of the problem. But each one of them has come into office with little or no familiarity with the problem, has had to acquaint himself with it, and has hardly had more than enough time to do so before his term of office has expired and he has been replaced by a successor who has had to take up the work subject to the same disadvantages. The same policy of political removal and political appointment has characterized the whole Indian administration. Sometimes, the appointments have been made by the Commissioner of Indian Affairs, sometimes by the Secretary of the Interior, sometimes, practically by local politicians; but in all cases alike not for expert knowledge of Indians but for political service rendered or to be rendered, or from reasons of personal friendship. The notion that there is a continuous and consistent policy to be pursued toward the Indians, and that this requires continuity of service and expertness of knowledge in the administration, has not entered the head of our public men, or, if so, has not been allowed to obtain lodgment there. That so bad a system has secured so many good Indian agents and subordinate officials is a matter for surprise. It is not surprising that it has in more than one instance sent a drunken official to keep the Indians sober, an ignorant official to superintend their education, and a lazy official to inspire them with industry. One recent illustration of the result of this method of administration is to be seen in the removal of Dr. Hailman, the Superintendent of Indian Education, an expert educator, whose retention in his office was urged upon the administration by substantially all those familiar with the work which he had done. An even more striking object lesson is afforded by the outbreak among the Pillager Indians, largely due to three successive appraisals of their timber lands, two of which appraisals have been set aside as inadequate, through the incompetence of the ap-

praisers, the enormous cost of each appraisal having been charged to the Indians.

But even if the Indian Bureau could be taken out of politics and kept out of politics, the reservation system would still be incurably bad. It assumes that the Federal executive can administer a paternal government over widely scattered local communities. For such a function it is peculiarly unfitted. The attempt to engraft a Russian bureaucracy on American democracy is a foredoomed failure. The Federal government does exercise paternal authority over the District of Columbia. But on the decent government of the district the well being, the health and perhaps the lives of the members of Congress depend; the relation between the government and the governed is thus direct, close, intimate. Local communities in the United States exercise some paternal functions, as in the case of the insane, the sick, and the paupers. But here again those directly interested have an opportunity of exercising an immediate supervision over the work and calling the public officials to account. But it is in the nature of the case impossible that a President, a Secretary of the Interior, or even a Commissioner of Indian Affairs, can personally supervise the innumerable details involved in the paternal administration of communities scattered from Minnesota to New Mexico, and from Michigan to California.

An aristocratic government, composed of men who have inherited political ability from a long line of governing ancestry, and who have been especially trained for that work from boyhood, so that both by inheritance and training they are experts, may be supposed fitted to take care of people weaker, more ignorant, or less competent than themselves, though the history of oligarchic governments does not render that supposition free from doubt. But there is nothing in either philosophy or history to justify the surmise that seventy millions of average men and women, most of whom are busy in attending to their own affairs, can be expected to take care of a people scattered through a widely extended territory—a people of social habits and social characteristics entirely different from their care-takers; nor is it much more rational to expect that public servants, elected on different issues, for a different purpose, can render this service efficiently. Our Government is founded on the principle of local self-government; that is, on the principle that each locality is better able to

take care of its own affairs than any central and paternal authority is to take care of them. The moment we depart from this principle we introduce a method wholly unworkable by a democratic nation. It may be wide of the present purpose, yet perhaps not as an illustration, to say, that if the United States assumes political responsibility for Cuba and the Philippines, as I personally think it is bound to do, it must fulfill that responsibility not by governing them as conquered territory from Washington, but by protecting and guiding, but not controlling them, while they attempt the experiment of local self-government for themselves. We have tried the first method with our Indians, and it has been a continuous and unbroken failure. We have tried the second method with the territory west of the Mississippi River, ours by conquest or by purchase, and it has been an unexampled success. If the Indian is the "ward of the nation" the executive should not be his guardian. How that guardianship should be exercised I shall indicate presently.

This political and undemocratic paternalism is thoroughly bad for the Indian, whose interests it is supposed to serve. It assumes that civilization can be taught by a primer in a school, and Christianity by a sermon in a church. This is not true. Free competition teaches the need of industry, free commerce the value of honesty; a savings bank the value of thrift; a railroad the importance of punctuality, better than either preacher or pedagogue can teach them. To those, and there are still some, who think we must keep the Indian on the reservation until he is prepared for liberty, I reply that he will never be prepared for liberty on a reservation. When a boy can learn to ride without getting on a horse's back, or to swim without going into the water, or to skate without going on the ice—then, and not before, can man learn to live without living. The Indian must take his chance with the rest of us. His rights must be protected by law; his welfare looked after by philanthropy; but protected by law and befriended by philanthropy he must plunge into the current of modern life and learn to live by living. The tepee will never fit him for the house, nor the canoe for the steamboat, nor the trail for highways and railroads, nor trapping and hunting for manufactures and husbandry. Imagine—the illustration is Edward Everett Hale's, not mine—imagine that we had pursued toward our immigrants the policy we have pursued toward the Indians; had shut the

Poles, the Hungarians, the Italians, the Germans, the Scandinavians, each in a reservation allotted to them, and forbidden them to go out into the free life of America until they had Americanized themselves—how long would the process have taken?

But the capital objection to the reservation system is that it is one impossible to maintain; and it is impossible to maintain because it ought not to be maintained. The tide of civilization, surging westward, comes some day to a fair and wealthy but unused and idle territory. There are forests which no woodsman's axe has ever touched; rivers where waterfalls turn no mill wheels; mountains whose treasures of gold or silver, iron or copper or coal no pickaxe has uncovered; prairies whose fertile soil is prolific only in weeds. "Come," cries the pioneer, eager to develop this useless territory, "let us go in and make those acres rich by our industry." "No!" replies the law; "you cannot." "Why not?" "It belongs to the Indians." "Where are they?" "Hunting, trapping, sleeping, idling, and fed on rations." "When are they going to use this land; to convert this timber into boards; these rivers into mill-streams; when are they going to excavate these minerals and turn these weedy prairies into fruitful farms?" "Never! This land in the heart of a civilized community is forever consecrated to barbarism." The pioneer's impatience with such a policy is fully justified, though his manner of manifesting it is not. Barbarism has no rights which civilization is bound to respect. The question on what basis the right to land rests is one of the most difficult which political economy has to answer. Many scholars who do not accept Henry George's conclusions accept his premise, that the soil belongs to the community, and that individual ownership rests not on any indefeasible right, but on the express or implied agreement of the community. Certain it is that the half a million, more or less, of Indians who roamed over this continent in the seventeenth century, had no right by reason of that fact to exclude from it the several hundred million industrious men and women whom eventually it will support. As little have a tribe of a few hundred Indians a right to keep in unproductive idleness a territory which if cultivated would provide homes for as many thousands of industrious workers. No treaty can give them that right. It is not in the power of the Federal Government to consecrate any portion of its territory thus to ignorance and idleness. It has tried, again and again, to do so;

it has always failed ; it always ought to fail ; it always will fail. English parks kept untilled, yet ministering to taste and refinement, have always been regarded by political economists as difficult to justify ; nothing can be said to justify American reservations, kept untilled only that they may minister to idleness and barbarism.

The editor of the *NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW*, in asking me to write this article, indicated his desire that I should write "on the probable future of the Indians in their relations with the Government, and the reforms necessary in the administration of their affairs." It may seem that I have been a long time coming to any definite answer to this question ; but in order to set forth succinctly a reform it is first necessary to set forth as clearly and forcibly as possible the evil to be reformed. That evil, I believe, is the reservation system. The reform is all summed up in the one word, abolish it. Cease to treat the Indian as a red man and treat him as a man. Treat him as we have treated the Poles, Hungarians, Italians, Scandinavians. Many of them are no better able to take care of themselves than the Indians ; but we have thrown on them the responsibility of their own custody, and they have learned to live by living. Treat them as we have treated the negro. As a race the African is less competent than the Indian ; but we do not shut the negroes up in reservations and put them in charge of politically appointed parents called Agents. The lazy grow hungry ; the criminal are punished ; the industrious get on. And though sporadic cases of injustice are frequent and often tragic, they are the gradually disappearing relics of a slavery that is past, and the negro is finding his place in American life gradually, both as a race and as an individual. The reform necessary in the administration of Indian Affairs is : Let the Indian administer his own affairs and take his chances. The future relations of the Indians with the Government should be precisely the same as the relations of any other individual, the readers of this article or the writer of it, for example. This should be the objective point, and the sooner we can get there the better. But this will bring hardship and even injustice on some individuals ! Doubtless. The world has not yet found any way in which all hardship and all injustice to individuals can be avoided. Turn the Indian loose on the continent and the race will disappear ! Certainly. The sooner the better. There is no more reason why we

should endeavor to preserve intact the Indian race than the Hungarians, the Poles, or the Italians. Americans all, from ocean to ocean, should be the aim of all American statesmanship. Let us understand once for all that an inferior race must either adapt and conform itself to the higher civilization, wherever the two come in conflict, or else die. This is the law of God, from which there is no appeal. Let Christian philanthropy do all it can to help the Indian to conform to American civilization; but let not sentimentalism fondly imagine that it can save any race or any community from this inexorable law.

This general and radical reform involves certain specific cures. For example :

1. The Indian Bureau ought to be taken at once and forever out of politics. The Government should find the man most expert in dealing with the Indians—he may be the present Commissioner of Indian Affairs—and instruct him to bring the Indian Bureau to a close at the earliest possible moment. Once appointed to office for that purpose he should stay there till the work is completed. I believe that in one respect an army officer would be the best fitted for such a post, because he would be eager to bring the work to a close, while the civilian would see a hundred reasons why it should be continued from year to year. His subordinates should be Indian experts, and removed only for cause, never for political reasons.

2. There are, it is said, ten or a dozen reservations in which the land has already been allotted in severalty and the reservations broken up. The agents in such cases should be dismissed. If the Indian still needs a guardian, if there is danger that his land will be taxed away from him, or that he will be induced to sell it for a song, the courts, not the executive, should be his guardian. Guardianship is a function the courts are accustomed to exercise. It ought not to be difficult to frame a law such that an Indian could always appeal to a Federal judge to have his tax appraisal revised, and always be required to submit to a Federal judge any proposed sale of real estate.

3. The Indian and every Indian should be amenable to the law and entitled to its protection. I believe that, despite occasional injustice from local prejudice, it would be quite safe to leave their interests to be protected by the courts of any State or Territory in which they live ; for I believe that the American

people, and certainly the American judiciary, can be trusted. The policy of distrust has intensified the local prejudice against the Indian. But it would be easy, if it be necessary, to provide that any Indian might sue in a United States court, or if sued or prosecuted might transfer the suit to a United States court. I assume there is no constitutional provision against such a law.

4. All reservations in which the land is capable of allotment in severalty should be allotted as rapidly as the work of surveying and making out the warrants can be carried on. The unallotted land should be sold and the proceeds held by the United States in trust for the Indians. How to be expended is a difficult question. Not in food and clothing, which only pauperize. The first lesson to be taught the Indian is, if he will not work, neither shall he eat. Perhaps in agricultural implements; perhaps in schools; perhaps in public improvements; perhaps in all three. When the land is of a kind that cannot be allotted in severalty, as in the case of extended grazing lands, for example, it would seem as though a skillful lawyer should be able to devise some way in which the tribe could be incorporated and the land given to the corporation in fee simple; in which case the shares of stock possibly for a time should be inalienable, except by approval of the court; or possibly the property might even be administered for a time by a receiver appointed by and answerable to the court.

5. Every Indian should be at once free to come and go as he pleases, subject as every other man is to the law of the locality and the processes of the courts where he is, and under their protection. The Indian with his blanket should have the privilege of travelling where he will, as much as the Italian with her shawl.

6. Finally, as fast and as far as the tribal organization is dissolved and the reservation is broken up, the Indian should have a ballot, on the same terms as other citizens; not so much because his vote will add to the aggregate wisdom of the community as because the ballot is the American's protection from injustice.

The reform is very simple, if it is very radical. It is: Apply to the solution of the Indian problem the American method; treat the Indian as other men are treated; set him free from his trammels; cease to coddle him; in a word, in lieu of paternal protection, which does not protect, and free rations, which keep him in beggary, give him justice and liberty and let him take care of himself.

LYMAN ABBOTT.